

Remarks Prior to a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters
January 14, 2014

The President. All right, well, I'm glad to be able to pull together my Cabinet for the first official Cabinet meeting of the year, and I want to wish everybody a wonderful new year.

We've got a lot to do in 2014. As I've said before, this is going to be a year of action. We've seen the economy improve. We want to maximize the pace of our recovery, but most importantly, we want to make sure that every American is able to benefit from that recovery; that we're not leaving anybody behind and everybody is getting a fair shot.

I was very pleased to see the House and the Senate agree to a budget and to put forward a bill that will fund our Government at levels that allow us to take some important steps to provide the services and the help that Americans need and American families need in order to get ahead in this economy. And so I would urge that Congress pass that funding measure as quickly as possible so that all these agencies have some certainty around their budgets.

And Congress is going to have some additional work over the course of the next several weeks; specifically, it's important that they do something about unemployment insurance. Although we've seen improvements in the economy and job creation in our economy, I think we all know that there are a lot of hard-working Americans out there who are desperately looking for a job, and unemployment insurance is not only good for them and necessary for them, but it's also good for our economy as a whole and will actually accelerate our growth if we go ahead and get that done. We know that we need to get immigration reform done, a major piece of unfinished business from last year.

So Congress is going to be busy, and I'm looking forward to working with Democrats and Republicans, House Members and Senate Members, to try to continue to advance the economic recovery and to provide additional ladders of opportunity for everybody. But one of the things that I'll be emphasizing in this meeting is the fact that we are not just going to be waiting for legislation in order to make sure that we're providing Americans the kind of help that they need. I've got a pen, and I've got a phone. And I can use that pen to sign Executive orders and take executive actions and administrative actions that move the ball forward in helping to make sure our kids are getting the best education possible and making sure that our businesses are getting the kind of support and help they need to grow and advance, to make sure that people are getting the skills that they need to get those jobs that our businesses are creating.

And I've got a phone that allows me to convene Americans from every walk of life—nonprofits, businesses, the private sector, universities—to try to bring more and more Americans together around what I think is a unifying theme: making sure that this is a country where if you work hard, you can make it.

And so one of the things that I'm going to be talking to my Cabinet about is, how do we use all the tools available to us, not just legislation, in order to advance a mission that I think unifies all Americans: the belief that everybody has got to take responsibility, everybody has got to work hard, but if you do, that you can support a family and meet the kinds of obligations that you have to yourself and your family, but also to your communities and to your Nation.

We're already seeing some examples of that. In fact, this week, I'll be traveling tomorrow down to North Carolina to talk about a manufacturing innovation hub that we initiated, talked about in our State of the Union last year. It's going to be moving forward. And there are a lot of folks down in North Carolina who are excited, because it's a perfect example of the kind of public-private partnership that can really make a difference in growing our economy faster and creating the kinds of good-paying jobs that help people get ahead.

I'll also be pulling together university presidents from all across the country to talk about how we can make college education more accessible to more young people around this country. And we're going to be bringing in CEOs from across the country to also have a conversation about commitments they can make to start hiring the long-term unemployed, people who oftentimes have terrific skills, have a great work ethic, have wonderful experience, but because of the misfortune of having been laid off or lost their jobs in the depths of a extremely severe recession, have been out of work long enough that now we're finding, it's very hard for them to just get in the door and make their case to an employer; that there's some screening that's taking place for people who have been out of work for more than a month or two and it makes it harder for them to get the kind of shot that they need. And we're going to try to work with CEOs to make a pledge that we're going to take a second look at these Americans who are very eager to get back to work and have the capacity to do so, but aren't getting the kind of shot that they need.

So overall, the message to my Cabinet—and that will be amplified in our State of the Union—is that we need all hands on deck to build on the recovery that we're already seeing. The economy is improving, but it could be improving even faster. A lot of people are doing better than they were in the depths of the recession, but there are still a lot of folks who need help. And I am absolutely confident that in 2014, if we're all working in the same direction and not worrying so much about political points, but worrying much more about getting the job done, that we can see a lot of improvement this year, and people will look back on 2014 as a year in which we didn't just turn the corner in the aggregate for the economy, but everybody started feeling a little more optimistic about our futures.

So I'm looking forward to the discussion. And with that, I'm going to kick you all out.
[Laughter]

Review of U.S. Signals Intelligence and Electronic Surveillance Programs

Q. How do you think the NSA is going to affect your year this year? And how will you address it on Friday?

The President. Thank you, guys.

Q. Have you finished your review on the NSA?

The President. Actually, it's getting close. So I'll have quite a bit to say about that very soon.

Q. How will that affect your year this year?

The President. Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:04 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Cabinet, meeting with President; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

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Subjects: Budget, Federal : Appropriations :: Consolidated; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Government and private sector, coordination efforts; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Unemployed workers, incentives to hire; Cabinet, meeting with President; Defense and national security : Electronic surveillance program; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: Career training and continuing education; Education : Standards and school accountability; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment insurance; Immigration and naturalization : Reform.

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